

Listen

A Seeker's Resource for Spiritual Direction

J U L Y 2 0 1 4

V O L 8 : I S S U E 3

EMERGING WISDOM: SHADOW DANCE

Does your life cast a shadow upon structures, people, or places? Where, and when, do you experience light which illumines hidden beauty and reflects your essence?

While in Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA, a free morning offered an opportunity to walk for several hours. Alone, no destination in mind, I wandered the streets near the central plaza, each step deliberate, my smartphone camera in one hand. I stepped breath by breath, allowing myself to be led by instinct and curiosity. I picked up the pace, or paused, sprinted across a street to avoid a car, and even parked myself on more than one bench to listen or write in a small journal.

Throughout this contemplative walk to notice and appreciate, my gaze and attention drew again and again to tree shadows of stark branches—barely budding with leaves—a dark contrast to the rising sun. My eyes drew toward a cloudless blue sky at 7,000 feet of altitude, and I paid attention to the curious way branches reached toward and touched one another in a circular embrace, or interwoven entanglement. Bird song accompanied me when I myself hummed a tune. Tucked into a museum courtyard near yet another statue, the breeze created a shadow branch dance upon sand-colored adobe walls. Shapes crisscrossed my skin and body, light and dark moving freely. My inner and outer awareness shifted into harmony, wholeness, and



Greater Roadrunner — *Geococcyx californianus*

absolute acceptance of the moment, distinction and judgment absent.

A day later, Roshi Joan Halifax would describe spiritual companioning as *coming alongside* someone, similar as if two boats drifted together in a current. I experienced this shadow dance of branch and limb structures, and tree branch embrace or entanglement, as clues about how to be in relationship with my own story, and how we gather in community, a coming alongside one another.

In order to counter the suffering I see and encounter in the world, with people I accompany, and within my own skin, I need elemental places of wildness—trees, rocks, rivers, horizon views, shadow, thunderstorms, snow. Perhaps you do too. All of these elements assist me to become grounded in the here and now, with roots like a tree, and branches to move with ease in the wind. Imam Jamal Rahman wrote, “In times of pain and suffering, spend time

in nature, which Sufis believe has been graced with divine energies to absorb and transform human suffering. Silently, with feeling, ask nature to help you, and open your heart to experience peace and healing.”

A landscape can befriend us offering the opportunity to pause, receive, accept, reciprocate, and penetrate into essence. A spiritual companion or guide will come alongside us during our leafing, shedding, and emergence when we seek to integrate shadow and light—a discernment of our next best step within our own life particularities. In order to bring peace and collaborative action into the world, we must learn to come alongside one another—with acceptance, curiosity, pausing, and reverence.

Where is your spiritual practice most enlivened? What landscapes aid you to show up and listen, reconciling dark and light, suffering and joy, within the skin of your body—your dwelling place in this life? 🌿

—Pegge Erkeneff

SEEDS OF INTEREST:

- 🌱 Field Notes: *Emerging Wisdom*
- 🌱 Field Guide: *Above all else, pray*
- 🌱 Poem: *Cloud of Unknowing*
- 🌱 Poem: *Anchorhold*
- 🌱 Global Resources
- 🌱 Ask Owl



Cloud of Unknowing

There's something
to be said for walking
the Small Point beach
in fog though just what
I'm not sure, the way
it swallows everything,
swirling, merging into
mist, these fingers held
before my face, ocean,
island, lighthouse, surf.

There is this sand
beneath my feet,
the grit of it, and this,
my breath, but nothing
else is seen or known,
who I am, where
I am going, when,
if ever, I'll arrive.

— Sarah Rossiter [Massachusetts, USA]

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ABOVE ALL ELSE, PRAY

I hear from some of my clients¹ that astrologically this is a time of emotional turmoil and a time when old patterns are coming up for transformation. I hear from many people who tell me that they are affected by difficult personal and planetary challenges, and that it is hard to not sink into despair and anxiety. Our conversations often open with phrases like, "I don't know how I am going to get through this, it's all too much, too difficult. I can't do it." The *it* equates to living life without overwhelming stress and uncertainty. Yet here we all are, living in times of unpredictability and change that are not going away anytime soon. Concomitant with that is the statement that "my spiritual practice has gone by the wayside. I'm too stressed, I have too much to do; I can't focus on my usual contemplative practice."

Spiritual wisdom through the traditions and ages advocates the benefit of a continued, regular, contemplative practice. That wisdom has also made it very clear that the discipline of such a spiritual practice pays off in hard times. Just when we feel like obedience to regular prayer or meditation time is the last thing we want to do, that is the time we most need it. One

of the reasons the establishment of a pattern of regular spiritual practice is of such great importance is because it makes the discipline of sitting in hard times possible.

The spiritual wise ones who have gone before us gave guidance that fiercely insisted in hard times especially, one must discipline oneself to sit and pray. No matter how hard it is to do, no matter that there is seemingly no response—sit. No matter how you interpret the reasons behind difficult times today, the advice still remains true. Take your spiritual practice to heart and engage yourself faithfully, no matter what else is happening in life. It is the only way you will find yourself whole and able to be of service in the midst of unpredictability and change.

Go—sit, move, contemplate, pray, meditate, chant. Do whatever you do, faithfully and with your whole heart. Your life will blossom with richness in the midst of fear and the unknown. The future of all our lives and the planet may depend on it. 🍃

—Suzanne Fageol has been a spiritual educator for over forty years. She is from the Caribbean and has lived, taught, and offered contemplative practices in Africa, Europe, and England. She currently lives on Whidbey Island, Washington, USA, and you can e-mail her at spirit@whidbey.com.

1 In the context of spiritual direction, "client" refers to someone seeking spiritual support and guidance, such as a spiritual directee, retreatant, parishioner, congregant, or seeker.

Listen

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and discover excellent questions to ask yourself and any potential spiritual directors you choose to interview. To locate a spiritual director or guide, go online to *Seek and Find Guide: A Worldwide Resource of Available Spiritual Directors*. More than 5,000 spiritual directors are listed by geographical location at **www.sdiworld.org**. 🍃



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Anchorhold

I dwell in self
the deepest cell

where intimacy
and love abide

where amity
breeds familiarity

and divinity
does not hide

I dwell in self
the deepest cell

where paradox
and complexity preside

where compassion
caresses solidarity

and diversity
is harmonized

I dwell in self
the dearest cell

where cosmos
and community reside

where audacity
births humanity

and mystery
forever guides

— Michele Micklewright, [Minnesota, USA]



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Sister Mary is a teacher and Spiritual Director who specializes in Celtic Spirituality. She has completed post-graduate work in Spirituality at the National University of Ireland.

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FIELD NOTES

Pause and slowly read these field notes, heard during *Emerging Wisdom SDI Educational Events*, Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA, 24–27 April 2014.

Allow a phrase to choose you. Then give permission for the few words to evoke a wisdom of unfolding within your heart, body, and mind, offering guidance for that which seeks emergence in your soulscape.

“Can you have a spiritual practice without a community?”

– Carli Romero

“We’re burdened and gifted with living in our moment of time.”

– Richard Rohr, OFM

“Spiritual friendship, companionship, and intimacy are the whole of the spiritual life.”

– Joshin Brian Byrnes

“I don’t know how you feel. ...

I can never really know what your experience is. ...

But, I can come alongside you.”

– Roshi Joan Halifax

“Vulnerability and mutuality is the path.”

– Richard Rohr, OFM

“How do you care for yourself?”

– Lynette Dungan

“A spiritual director cannot lose a sense of humor.

With a sense of humor you can sneak in a lot.”

– Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi

“In China, many people have never asked, ‘What is my truth?’ Spiritual direction allows the space of asking, ‘What do I want? ...’”

– Nita Ng

“When I’m on my deathbed, it’s not just what I’m experiencing. It’s what everyone else is experiencing too.”

– Dennis Linn

“When we use the word *contemplative*, we’re using a word beyond recent trendiness.”

– Richard Rohr, OFM

“When vulnerability meets vulnerability we have true intimacy.”

– Lance Ng

“A yes to God in every guise is the opposite of what feels good, and continually is disarming our hearts.”

– Mirabai Starr

“The work of spirituality is to expand our freedom.”

– Richard Rohr, OFM

“Become a student with your own mind and heart.”

– Roshi Joan Halifax

“What is our dance with God?”

– Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi



ASK OWL

Question: Can my spiritual guide also be my spiritual teacher, or are these two separate roles? I have a desire to deepen my spiritual practice, and learn even more about my spiritual tradition.



to you, explain a concept, or offer suggestions for reading, learning, and contemplative practice or prayer.

In contrast, a spiritual teacher may focus upon a specific foundation or topic of study and engage with you and your experiences from this perspective. A spiritual teacher might only be in your life for a short season of time.

Hoot Hoot: Good question for clarification! The truth is, with an open

perspective and desire to learn, everyone we encounter can teach us. A good spiritual director will model excellent listening skills, compassionate presence, and a willingness to be with us, no matter what story emerges. A spiritual companion does not pass judgment upon us, and creates a safe sanctuary for our own story to emerge, in all of its complexity. A spiritual guide listens for the animating spirit that quickens in our life and desires. That spirit will guide us to healing and wholeness, and discerned action. A spiritual guide tunes into the story that emerges from our sharing, and allows the spirit—and you—to lead the dance. A spiritual director might offer spiritual practices

In some spiritual traditions the spiritual teacher and spiritual guide are one and the same. However, the question to ask yourself is, *What am I seeking? What does my inner life long for?* Your response to this question will give you clarity and your spiritual guide will also ask you a series of questions in your initial meeting, or when questions about ongoing study and learning emerge. A student-teacher relationship might be markedly different than a spiritual companioning relationship, or contain similarities. 🦉

—If you have a question for Owl, please e-mail Listen@sdiworld.org.

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—Translated by Marta Rios and Xavier Ortiz Monasterio

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